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Summary record of the 20th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 23 October 2007, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Wolfe ..... (Jamaica)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 70: Promotion and protection of human rights (A/62/36, 369 and 464)

(a) Implementation of human rights instruments (A/62/40 (vols. I and II), 44, 48, 180, 189, 221, 224, 273 and 299)

(f) Celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(d) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

1. **Mr. Mbaidjol** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), introducing the reports submitted under agenda item 70 (a), said that the annual report of the Human Rights Committee (A/62/40) covered the period 1 August 2006 to 31 July 2007. The annual report of the Committee against Torture (A/62/44) included the reports on that Committee's thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth sessions. The Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (A/62/189) provided information on the recommendations adopted by the Board of Trustees at its twenty-sixth session, in particular those of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, and the steps taken by the Board and the Secretariat to implement them. The annual report of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (A/62/48) covered the Committee's fifth and sixth sessions. In view of the number of initial reports awaiting consideration, the Committee had requested to hold two sessions in 2008.

2. The report of the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies on their nineteenth meeting (A/62/224) provided information on developments in the work of treaty bodies. It included a summary of a meeting between the chairpersons and the President of the Human Rights Council, in which the chairpersons had underlined the complementary and mutually reinforcing nature of the treaty body system and the future universal periodic review mechanism. The chairpersons were also of the opinion that the inter-committee meeting should be convened twice a year.

3. The Secretary-General's report on the protection of migrants (A/62/299) summarized information received from various Governments and referred to the activities of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The Secretary-General's report on the status of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery (A/62/180) contained an overview of the financial status and activities of the Fund.

4. **Mr. Guo** Xiaofeng (China) said that China was a party to 21 international human rights instruments and that the Chinese Government attached great importance to their provisions; paid close attention to the submission of compliance reports to the relevant treaty bodies, with which it maintained a regular dialogue; and followed up the concluding comments of the respective committees. Under the principle of "one country, two systems", his Government energetically supported the authorities of the Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions in their efforts to protect human rights and fulfil their obligations under the relevant conventions, and incorporated the reports prepared by the Governments of those regions into its reports to human rights bodies.

5. While international human rights instruments and human rights treaty bodies had effectively contributed to the promotion and protection of human rights, the complexity and redundancy of the current reporting system were a problem. The Chinese Government took note of the reform proposals of the Secretary-General and the competent United Nations bodies, and appreciated the efforts made with a view to streamlining the functioning of the human rights treaty bodies and enhancing their efficiency. Reform initiatives should, inter alia, aim at ensuring that the requirements for the contents of the reports and their consideration did not go beyond the purview of the relevant treaties. Consensus should be reached through extensive solicitation of opinions and suggestions.

6. **Mr. Mohamad** (Sudan) said that economic, social and cultural rights should be given the same degree of importance as political and civil rights. Cultural rights in particular needed to be strengthened in order to promote tolerance as an antidote to the culture of elitism that sought to wipe out cultural diversity. The results of the fifth and sixth sessions of the Human Rights Council had demonstrated a new spirit and were a welcome relief from the politicization, double standards and contentiousness of its predecessor. His country looked forward to the restructuring of the Council, which would coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should also operate with neutrality, transparency and greater geographic balance to prevent it from being politicized.

7. The Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in the Sudan had repeatedly been invited to visit the Sudan to observe human rights progress, and the interim report on the situation of human rights in Darfur prepared by the group of experts mandated by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 4/8 had called Sudan's cooperation excellent. No nation could claim to be free of human rights problems, and the way to solve them was through collective effort and continued support for the Council.

8. **Ms. Kurosaki** (Japan) said that, despite significant progress achieved since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, grave human rights violations continued to take place. Her Government believed that human rights, being universal values, should be furthered in every part of the world. It highly appreciated the role played by the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in that regard and supported the activities of the Human Rights Council.

9. Japan had ratified and was implementing the main human rights instruments. Moreover, every year Japan observed a "human rights week" ending on 10 December, the day of adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2007, the fifty-ninth human rights week would emphasize respect for the human rights of, among others, women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, foreigners and persons affected by HIV/AIDS or leprosy; and would address the violation of human rights through abuse of the Internet.

10. Serious problems had been pointed out with regard to the current reporting system under the main human rights treaties. As a result of the excessive reporting burden, States parties tended to delay or even fail to submit their reports, and committees were unable to keep up with the volume of reports. Moreover, as the number of human rights treaties increased, so did the work of treaty bodies, the membership of the committees, the number of sessions they must hold and the financial burden to be shouldered. Government reports should therefore be streamlined. However, the solution of a unified treaty body, which had been proposed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, presented several problems related to its working methods, use of qualified experts and costs. Japan would continue to participate actively in discussions on treaty body reform in order to ensure that the system functioned more effectively and efficiently.

11. **Ms. Blum** (Colombia) said that the Government of Colombia had recently extended until 2010 the operation of the national office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, thus demonstrating its commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights. Under the Democratic Security Policy, the country was taking effective action against illegal guerrilla and self-defence groups, and violence had been reduced throughout the country. The reactivation of the economy and the implementation of social programmes had led to improvements in the observance of economic, social and cultural rights. In the field of political rights, Colombia's democratic tradition was being strengthened despite attempts at intimidation by terrorists. Municipal and departmental elections would be held on 28 October 2007.

12. The State had also taken specific steps to promote and protect human rights, including through training programmes for police forces, prison personnel and civil servants in general. The Office of the High Commissioner had provided support for several of those actions. The President's programme and the Human Rights Observatory, headed by the Vice-President, had served as catalysts for inter-agency activities. Special policies focusing on human rights were being implemented to help vulnerable populations such as indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians, children, women, youth and displaced persons. Plans of action on human rights were being implemented in conjunction with local development plans. A national plan of action on human rights was being drawn up, and a state plan which included gender mainstreaming was being developed in coordination with civil society.

13. Priority would continue to be given to consolidating democratic security, overcoming extreme poverty, strengthening the administration of justice and eliminating impunity. Special emphasis was being placed on demobilizing illegal armed groups and weakening guerrilla activity, consolidating the rule of law and establishing effective guarantees for democracy and social and economic progress. Colombia needed international support for its efforts to

create an atmosphere of trust, security and well-being in which citizens could exercise their rights.

14. **Mr. Jang** (Republic of Korea) said that the steady growth in the number of treaties and ratifications had overloaded the treaty bodies system. A unified standing treaty body had the potential to help streamline the implementation mechanisms of the various human rights treaty bodies. The discussions on the matter should proceed on a long-term basis in order to allow Member States time to harmonize their divergent points of view. It would be crucial to devise a unified system which maintained the advantage of specificity. The new system must also have the capacity to address complicated legal issues associated with the restructuring of independent human rights treaty bodies into a unified body.

15. The High Commissioner for Human Rights should provide technical assistance to countries that were behind in their reporting duties owing to resource restraints. The concerned countries should remain as open-minded as possible in order to facilitate discussions on the issue. The Human Rights Council was to be commended for having launched the innovative mechanism of the universal periodic review, which would enable it to follow up the work of the treaty bodies, to make States parties more responsible for implementing recommendations and to identify where technical assistance was required. The universal periodic review would also facilitate ratification of human rights instruments and the timely submission of reports to treaty bodies. Noting that an increasing number of human rights issues were being politicized, he stressed the need for the international community to exert its utmost efforts to revive the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration.

16. **Mr. Ritter** (Liechtenstein) said that one of the challenges of the universal periodic review would be to coordinate the input of treaty bodies for the compilation of information which would form the basis of the review. Treaty bodies would have to prioritize relevant recommendations to ensure that the main human rights concerns in the country under consideration were appropriately reflected. For such input, close cooperation between the treaty bodies would therefore be essential. Frequent coordination between treaty bodies and special procedures would also be important, not only in preparation for the review but also for its follow-up. Ways and means to manage conflicts and divergences that might arise with regard to the findings of the special procedures and the treaty bodies and the conclusions of the review should also be considered. That could be done only on the basis of a clear distinction between the two systems and the reaffirmation of the independent and legal character of the treaty body review. In order to strengthen that independence, an improved process of nomination and selection of treaty body members should be envisaged.

17. The treaty bodies were to be commended for their continued engagement in the process of reform and their preparedness to test new approaches, adopt innovative working methods and explore areas for harmonization. Such issues could be usefully discussed at meetings of States parties. His delegation welcomed in particular those measures which were aimed at addressing the problem of non-reporting and the lack of effective follow-up to concluding observations and to views on individual complaints. Practical measures that did not require any amendments to the relevant human rights treaties were far more important than ambitious but unrealistic attempts to radically reduce the number of treaty bodies. In that context, his delegation welcomed the proposal that the inter-committee meeting should take place twice a year.

18. Liechtenstein had been a long-standing supporter of treaty body reform and had hosted two expert meetings on the issue in the last few years. A clear delineation must be made between the independent expert work of treaty bodies and the intergovernmental universal periodic review.

19. **Ms. Swaraj** (India) said that the establishment of a unified standing treaty body proposed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was not a panacea for existing problems. Not only was such a proposal fraught with serious legal challenges, it also ignored the distinct and unique scope and nature of different conventions. The ongoing efforts to change working methods and streamline reporting requirements through revised harmonized guidelines, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents, were steps in the right direction.

20. India had participated actively in the efforts of the international community to develop a normative framework for promotion and protection of human rights, including by advocating equal rights for women

well before they had been recognized in most legal systems. It had been the seventh country to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and had signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance on the first day of its opening for signature. India had also supported the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Her Government had made every effort to meet its reporting obligations with regard to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which had considered the second and third combined report of India in January 2007, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, to which it had reported in February 2007. India had submitted its latest report to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in October 2006.

21. **Mr. Al Bayati** (Iraq) said that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments were essential to international efforts to ensure respect for human rights and freedoms. His Government was working to bring its national legislation into line with international agreements it had signed, which included five of the core United Nations human rights conventions and several International Labour Organization human rights-related conventions. A Ministry of Human Rights and a parliamentary Human Rights Committee had been established, and a draft law to establish a human rights monitoring agency had been prepared. Numerous non-governmental human rights organizations took part in conferences abroad and worked to establish transparency and good governance at home. Iraq's new draft Constitution guaranteed human rights, and in particular the right of women to take part in the political process. The five-year plan contained in the International Compact with Iraq included a number of reforms that would firmly establish democracy and human rights in the new regime.

22. **Mr. Nebie** (Burkina Faso) said that Burkina Faso had signed almost all the most recent international and regional human rights instruments and had established a number of institutions for the promotion of human rights, including the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, the Ministry for the Promotion of Human Rights, the National Human Rights Commission and the National Independent Elections Commission. The establishment of those institutions had been accompanied by policy measures relating to good governance, gender issues and the action to combat poverty, as well as a policy and plan of action for the promotion and protection of human rights, including human rights education. The reform of the court system had significantly contributed to the enjoyment by citizens of their rights. The Government's efforts had been supplemented and reinforced by civil society organizations which were working to raise awareness and carrying out information and training programmes.

23. The main obstacle Burkina Faso had encountered in its efforts to implement the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was a lack of resources. His delegation appealed to the international community to offer cooperation and assistance so that human rights would be observed throughout the world. He wished to thank the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for its help with the organization of a regional colloquium on the rights of the child to be held in Ouagadougou in November 2007.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.